



# Mission Settlement


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 **Grade Level:** 7


 **Subject Area:**  
Social Studies

 **Duration:**  
Pre-visit: 2-4 hours  
Visit: 1 day

 **Setting:**  
Classroom and at least two missions

 **Skills:**  
7.2B Identify important individuals, events and issues related to European exploration and colonization of Texas, including the establishment of Catholic missions  
7.2F Contrast Spanish and Anglo purposes for and methods of settlement in Texas  
7.21C Organize and interpret information from visuals including maps

 **Charting the Course:**  
Students should be familiar with the concept of graphic representation used in maps prior to this activity.

 **Essential Terms:**  
*acequia*, secularization, surface water, mission, presidio, 3-prong plan of Spanish settlement

## SYSTEMS

**Big Idea**  
**How did the Spanish system of colonization and water usage influence San Antonio?**

### Objectives

Students will:

- ◆ Locate San Antonio River, *acequias* and missions on an aerial photograph
- ◆ Assume a persona from the Catholic Church, the military, or Spanish colonists and write a petition to the Spanish Crown

### Background

From the beginning, people have flocked to this region because of water. Hunter-gatherers found that the continually flowing Yanaguana River and its system of springs provided lush vegetation and well-fed wildlife despite hot dry summers. Spanish settlers compared the area to arid northern Mexico and declared it an oasis. The

river was renamed San Antonio.

The Spanish typically utilized surface water when planning their colonies. Missions, with their extensive farmlands, were dependent upon the San Antonio River. Each mission had an extensive irrigation system based on gravity-flow ditches called *acequias*. In order to utilize the largest amount of acreage, missions, and consequently *acequias*, were built on alternating sides of the river.

The Spanish government used a 3-pronged plan (military, Catholic Church/mission system and Spanish colonists/civil government) to establish its colonies. The Catholic Church was an integral part of the mission's process. The church presided over the mission system. This plan called for eventual secularization, or the turning ownership of the property over to the Christianized Mission Indians and their descendants. The mission's primary purpose was to educate the indigenous people in

religion, various trades, and the European way of life. By making the Indians "good" Spanish citizens, they and their offspring would secure Spain's foothold on the territory.

Spanish colonists also immigrated to Texas. They established a separate community (Plaza de Islas with San Fernando Church) and presided over the civil government.

The military was housed at an outpost or *presidio* (Plaza de Armas). It protected Spain's claim to the region, as well as providing assistance to its civic and religious counterparts.

Although the three entities interacted, things did not always go smoothly. Letters were often written to the Spanish Viceroy of New Spain (or other representatives of the Spanish Crown) to settle disputes and misunderstandings between the factions.

## Making Connections

Many structures built in San Antonio's earliest days are still in use. It is often hard to picture the separateness of the original 3-prong plan because the once distinct communities have flourished and grown into one another. The inhabitants of these communities have also intermingled through marriages.

However, the influence of early settlement patterns can still be seen today. One of the largest concentrations of Hispanics in San Antonio is along its rivers and creeks, sites where the Spanish originally settled. It is interesting to note that some farms still rely on the *acequia* system for irrigation. Conversely the highest concentration of Anglos can be found to the Northeast where German settlers drilled wells dependent on the underground Edwards Aquifer. Please note that the wells were shallow and typically tapped into the aquifer relatively close to the surface. This made it preferable to have some proximity to established water sources (e.g. New Braunfels and San Marcos).

## Materials

Engagement (pre-visit):

- ♦ map of Egypt

Exploration (pre-visit):

- ♦ aerial photograph of San Antonio Missions (S-1-A)

Elaboration (pre-visit):

- ♦ Spanish Colonization: 3-Prong Plan (S-1-B) overhead transparency

Evaluation (visit):

- ♦ Spanish *Acequia* Systems Worksheet (S-1-C)(1 per student)

## **Engagement (Pre-visit):**

Display current map of Egypt. Locate the major cities. What do they have in common? They are all built on a river. Discuss the importance of locating on a river.

## **Exploration (Pre-visit):**

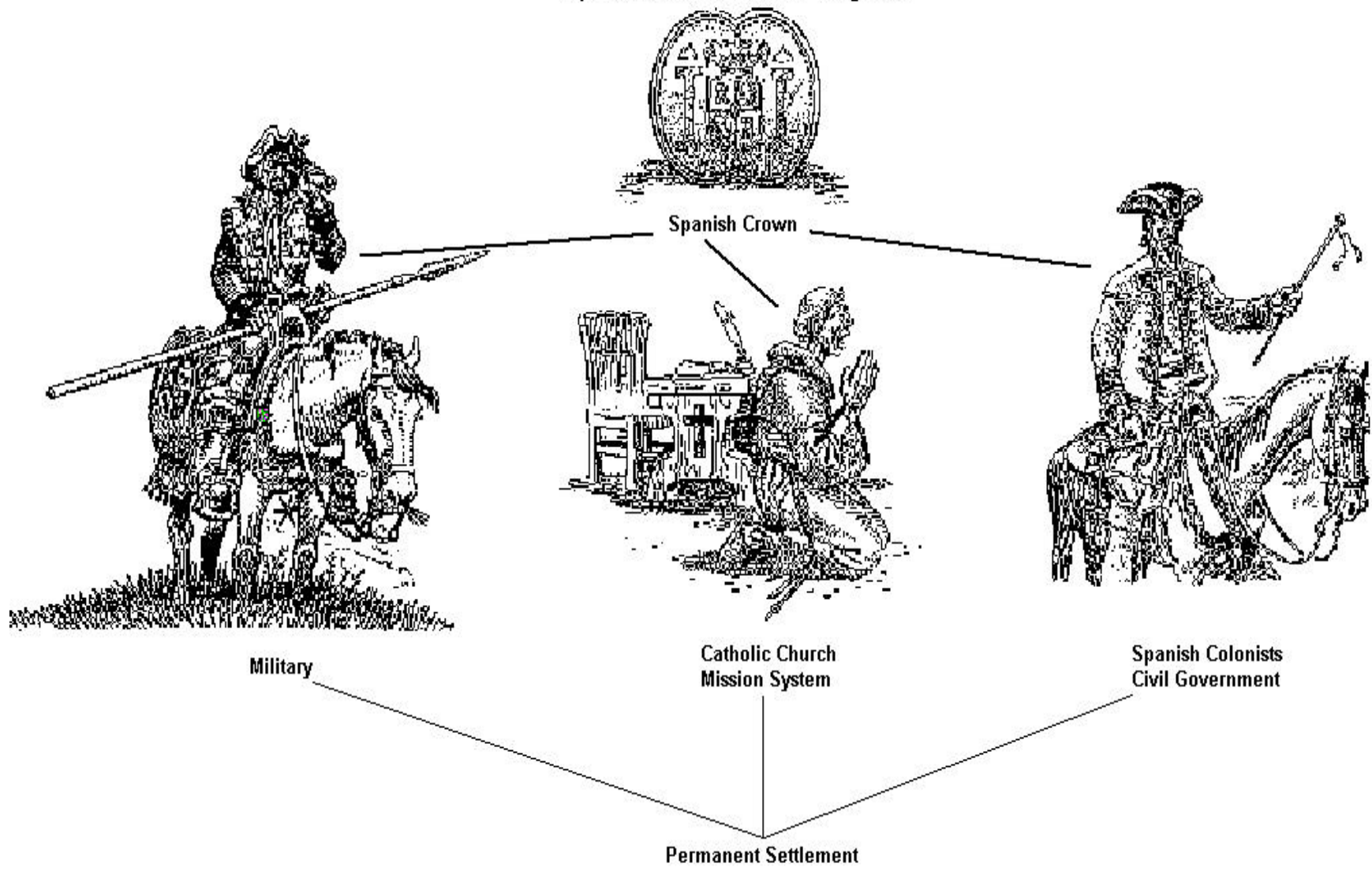
Display aerial photograph of San Antonio Missions. Ask students, in pairs, to locate the river, *acequias* and the missions on the photograph. What do they notice about the missions in relation to the water? List their observations about the map on the board for future reference.

## **Explanation (Pre-visit):**

The Spanish typically utilized surface water when planning their colonies. They based their mission layouts on a system of irrigation ditches called *acequias*. The *acequias* were systematically built on



### Spanish Colonization - 3-Prong Plan



*Illustrated by Jack Jackson*